

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (Previously Presented) An apparatus connecting buyers and sellers of products and services comprising:
  - a comprehensive directory of companies;
  - a user-maintained database of registered and subscribing companies selected from said comprehensive directory; and,
  - service-brokering tools for interacting with said directory of companies and user-maintained database of companies, wherein said service-brokering tools comprise:
    - registering means for buyers and sellers to subscribe to the user-maintained database;
    - contacting means for buyers and sellers to contact subscribing members of the user-maintained database over a network;
    - searching means for said buyers and sellers to search said directory and said user-maintained database based on geographical boundaries,
    - assigning means denoting a weighted importance to provider characteristics associated with each subscribing buyer and seller using object affiliations to indicate a level of presence each object is given in the directory, wherein the level of presence is based upon company profile, search result positioning and access to Requests for Proposals to afford each subscribing buyer and seller to be listed in multiple brands;
    - ordering means for ranking buyers and sellers according to said weighted importance of provider characteristics stored in the user-maintained database;
    - branding means for defining visual attributes, geometric layouts, graphical layouts, textual layouts, interface elements, and logical design elements that can be used to dynamically generate a branded Web site to afford each subscribing buyer and seller a different appearance across directories; and
    - an internal mechanism for a Web server to infer a private label interface from an initial network request of a registered and subscribing company that can persist and cache said private label interface information for the Web server by loading taxonomies specific to

individual user-maintained databases and specifying the location of a request for proposal by publishing a pending Partner record to an active record and informing servers within a qualified farm of load-balanced Web servers to re-load said active record in response to a posting of a new request in a qualified server's category.

2-3. (Canceled)

4. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said service-brokering tools further comprise objects that can be used to generate private label interface-specific HTML wherein the object specifies the location of a request for proposal.

5. (Canceled)

6. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 4, wherein said service-brokering tools further comprise a mechanism to synchronize partner information across said farm of load-balanced Web servers based upon the topology of the qualified farm, wherein the synchronized partner information comprises updated files incorporating the latest information independent of the server that supplies the information.

7-31. (Canceled)